Staff Tips

2010 Digital Camera Review

—by John Petersen

Most of the draws are out and if you are like me you're trying to explain to your wife how you ended up with 2 or 3 more hunts than you had mentioned. Last year I got away with a lot of time in the field because I was scouting for HER elk hunt, this year I'm just in trouble. My strategy is to suggest more "girl's weekends" to gain some extra brownie points before fall—we'll see how that goes. All this means it's time to go through your pack and determine what gear needs to be upgraded. One of the main items you should look at is your camera. There are a few basic things that will greatly improve your hunting photos that I will cover over the next few months, but the number one thing you can do is to use a high quality digital camera.

IS IT TIME TO UPGRADE?

Technology changes so fast that if your digital camera is over 3-4 years old it is probably outdated. Yes it will still work but even an inexpensive newer model camera will generally out perform a camera that is 4 years old. When purchasing a camera this year look for one from one of the top manufacturers that is 12 megapixel or more—preferably 14+.

HD VIDEO CAPABILITIES

Last year I mentioned HD video advancements in point and shoot type cameras. This year more than ever I think that it's time to upgrade to a camera that will record HD video. Plus, this year we are encouraging our members to send us video clips of their hunts that can potentially be featured on our website to supplement their story. Go to www.huntinfool.com/video to see live footage of the buck on this month's cover! Many hunters have wanted to combine their video and still cameras into one for years and video cameras, in my opinion, have always taken terrible still photos. Unless you plan on professionally editing your hunting videos don't even lug around your old video camera, just take a point and shoot type camera that will take both high quality pictures and HD video!

HOW TO TAKE GREAT VIDEO WITH A POINT AND SHOOT CAMERA

Point and shoot cameras with HD video capabilities are perfect for capturing live animal footage, kill scenes, and kill interviews to share with your friends and family. Although they don't perform as well as a true video camera when it comes to refocusing while recording and audio quality, I've found the video quality on digital cameras to be very good for hunting videos if you follow a few simple techniques.

Point & Shoot Video Tips

1. Treat each video segment like a still shot, get the shot completely set up before you push record
2. Minimize camera movement while you are recording
3. Don't move from close up objects to far away objects while recording
4. Don't zoom in and out while recording
5. Take plenty of extra memory cards
6. Send in your video clips with your stories.

When taking video with most digital cameras the exposure and focus are set at the moment you start recording each clip. Unlike video cameras, point and shoot cameras don't re-adjust these settings in the middle of a clip. To get the camera to refocus you need to stop recording and start a new clip.

If you want to video an object that is close, then move to an object that is more distant, record two separate clips. For example if you want to video your hunting buddy who is glassing a distant deer, first focus on your buddy and record a clip of him, then push the shutter button to stop that sequence. Then move the camera, while you are not recording, to the live distant deer and get the deer framed and the zoom set before you start recording the second clip. Try not to move the camera around a lot while recording.

HD video takes up a lot of memory card space, so make sure you have plenty of high capacity memory cards if you plan on taking HD video. A general rule of thumb is you can record about 5 minutes of HD video for each gigabyte of storage space. So if your storage card is 4 gigabytes you should roughly be able to shoot 20 minutes of video on that storage card. Also make sure you are recording the highest quality video your camera is capable of.

TOP CAMERAS COMPARISON CHART						
Category	Model Dimensions	Mega-pixels	Average Price	Zoom	Focal Length	Comments
Budget Compact	Canon A3100 IS 3.8 x 2.3 x 1.1 in	12.1	$150	4x	35-140mm	Customizable Self-timer, Great Budget Camera, Mostly Automatic Controls, Only Standard (480) Def Video, No Wide Angle Lens
Ultra Compact Point and Shoot	Canon SD3500 IS 3.9 x 2.2 x 0.9 in	14.1	$330	5x	24-120mm	Excellent Resolution, Super Wide Angle Lens, Customizable Self-timer, 720p HD Video, Mostly Automatic Controls, Touch Screen Controls, Tiny Camera, Excellent Image Quality
Compact Advanced User Super-Zoom	Canon SX210 IS 4.1 x 2.4 x 1.5 in	14.1	$350	14x	28-392mm	Excellent Resolution, 720p HD Video, Very Good Zoom for its Compact Size, Full Manual Controls, Customizable Self-timer
Advanced User Super-Zoom	Canon SX20 IS 5 x 3.5 x 3.4 in	12.1	$360	20x	28-560mm	Awesome Zoom, Flip Out Screen, 720p HD Video, Full Manual Controls, Takes AA batteries, Customizable Self-timer
Digital SLR	Canon EOS Rebel T2i 5.1 x 3.9 x 5 in (with 18-55mm lens)	18	$899 w/ 18-55mm lens	Depends on the Lens	Depends on the Lens	Unbelievable Resolution, Unsurpassed Image Quality, 1080p HD Video. In my opinion this is the best SLR camera under $1,000 on the market! This is a large camera not typically suited for backpack type hunting.

But if filming your hunt is your main priority, use a real HD video camera to shoot video not you digital camera.

WARNING — Even though some video cameras are boasting 12 megapixel digital camera capabilities, do not use your video camera in place of a still camera for kill shots. Contrary to what is advertised, you will not get the same quality still photos from your video camera as your still camera.

CHOOSING A CAMERA

Choosing a new digital camera can be overwhelming, but if you stick with the top manufacturer's newest models it's hard to go wrong. In my opinion the top manufacturers are: Canon, Sony, Nikon, Panasonic, and Leica. Each of these companies make fantastic cameras that perform very well.

That said, after reviewing the new cameras this year I found that Canon cameras took the top spot in every category important to hunters. In my opinion the image quality and performance found in the Canon cameras this year was unsurpassed.

FINDING THE RIGHT MODEL FOR YOU

The first step in choosing a camera is deciding what type and size camera meets your needs, then look at the features you want in that category. For hunters I have narrowed it down to five categories: the Budget Compact

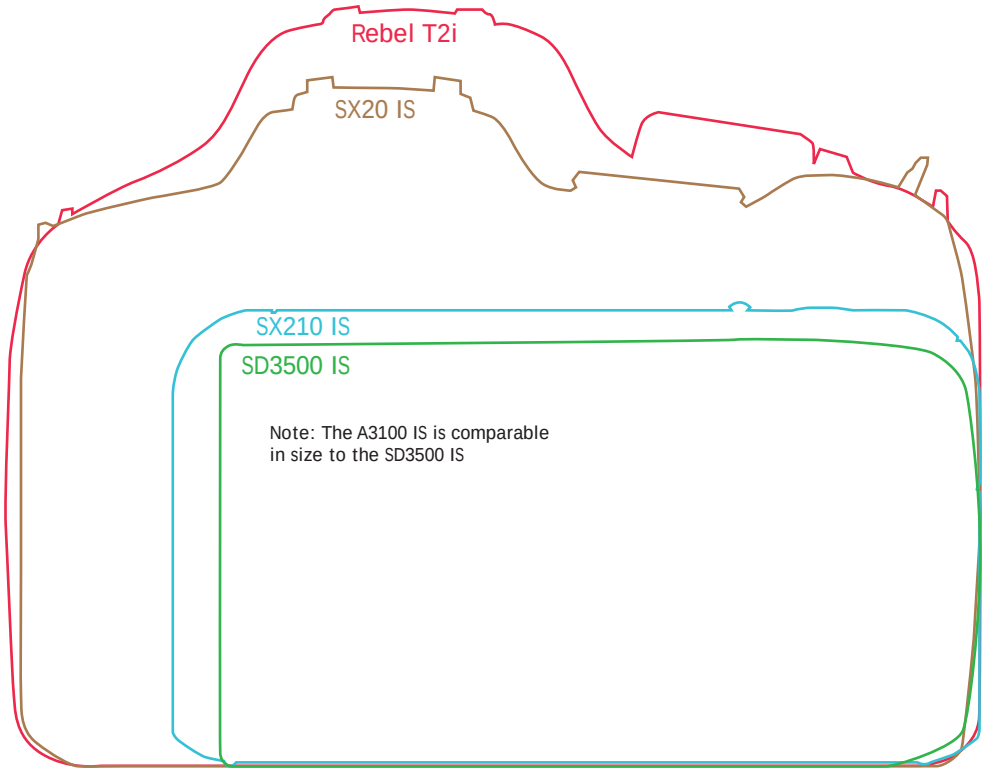
A3100 IS

SD3500 IS

SX210 IS

SX20 IS

Rebel T2i


Camera Size Chart
(Cameras are Shown at Actual Size)
Rebel T2i
SX20 IS
SX210 IS
SD3500 IS
Note: The A3100 IS is comparable in size to the SD3500 IS

category, the Ultra Compact/Point and Shoot category, the Compact Advanced User/Super Zoom category, the Super-Zoom category, and the professional type Interchangeable Lens Digital SLR category.

BUDGET COMPACT

If you are on a budget and you currently own a digital camera that is under 10 megapixels you should consider upgrading to a camera like the Canon A3100 IS. It doesn't have HD video or some of the bells and whistles of the more expensive models but at 12 megapixels it will still blow your old camera away.

ULTRA COMPACT, POINT AND SHOOT

This is the camera that is right for 80% of hunters. They are small enough to easily slip into a shirt pocket and are very easy to use because everything is just automatic "point and shoot." If you don't know or care what an aperture is, the Canon PowerShot SD3500 IS is the camera for you. I've been waiting for a camera with this feature set for years. This 14 megapixel camera is packed with great features, like 720p HD video, a super wide-angle lens, and intelligent contrast correction.

Over the years the top cameras in the Canon PowerShot "SD" line have produced some of the best photos we have seen on a consistent basis from point and shoot cameras! Just look at this month's cover of *The Huntin' Fool*! They also feature a customizable self-timer that is perfect for hunting situations. Most digital cameras let you choose a 2 or 10 second delay for the self-timer, but the SD line has a customizable self-timer mode which allows you to set the self-timer for anywhere from 10 to 30 seconds then take up to 10 pictures in rapid succession. It works great in solo hunting situations and is a huge feature!

COMPACT ADVANCED USER SUPER-ZOOM

If you know what an aperture and an f-stop are or having full manual control is important, you'll want to look at the next two categories. My top pick in this category is the Canon PowerShot SX210 IS. When compared to the other top cameras in this category it is a great value. As well as excellent image quality, it also features a 14x zoom, a wide-angle lens, and shoots 720p HD video! This is the camera I would personally choose this fall.

ADVANCED USER SUPER-ZOOMS

I would only recommend the Canon SX20 IS if 14x zoom just isn't enough for you and you are willing to carry a larger camera. It takes phenomenal photos and with the 20x zoom you will love this camera for live animal shots but again it's a big camera, especially for backpack type hunting.

DIGITAL SLRS

If you are ready to go to the professional quality level and are willing to carry a larger camera look at a digital SLR camera. These cameras accept interchangeable lenses and when used with skill, produce vastly superior photographs. These cameras feature big lenses, which make them bulky and not well suited for backpack hunting. If you are a serious photographer the jump in image quality is worth the trade-offs in weight. It's hard to go wrong with either the Canon, Sony, or Nikon cameras. But the new Canon EOS Rebel T2i, in my opinion, is the best SLR type camera on the market for under $1,000. It also records full 1080p HD video—an amazing camera!

ACCESSORIES

Make sure you have the right accessories for your digital camera or you may get stuck in the middle of nowhere with a camera that doesn't work. You need a few large memory cards, an extra battery or two, a protective case, and a tripod.

Extra batteries are essential, when the batteries in your digital camera die, your camera is useless. You should also purchase additional memory cards. The higher the capacity of the card the more photos the card will store (see the table on this page). Memory cards are cheap; you can now get a 8GB card for $20! There are many types of memory cards so be sure you purchase ones that will fit your camera.

If you are planning on using the self-timer to take photos of your trophy, pick up a lightweight tripod for your camera. Most tripods you use for a spotting scope will also work for your camera.

With any new camera you should practice taking pictures before you're in the field. If you don't something will probably go wrong, especially if you aren't totally comfortable with technology.

For reproduction purposes in *The Huntin' Fool*, high resolution images from 10 to 14+ megapixel cameras reproduce best. However, please remember I want your hunting photos no matter the quality—everyone loves seeing trophy animals, even if the picture isn't perfect. Good luck on your upcoming hunts and be sure to send us your trophy photos!

Hunting Photography Tips

DO

- Use a 12-14+ megapixel digital camera
- Always Take Extra batteries
- Always Take Extra Memory Cards
- Have a Backup camera

DON'T

- Use a Disposable Camera
- Use a Cell Phone Camera Except for a Few Pictures to Email Your Buddies
- Use a Video Camera for Still Photos

APPROXIMATE NUMBER OF IMAGES OR VIDEO PER MEMORY CARD

Camera	128MB	2GB	4GB	8GB
10 mpxl	26	512	1,024	2,048
12 mpxl	20	448	896	1,792
14 mpxl	16	306	612	1,224
HD Video	40 sec	10 min	20 min	40 min